

I didn't expect to find great climbing in Namibia; I expected a brief stint of good climbing, followed by a long search for passable climbing. I'd gone to Africa before to merge climbing and culture, in Ethiopia and South Africa, and kept my climbing expectations low and my life-broadening hopes high. I'd told myself that utter climbing success might be impossible. I didn't say it out loud, thankfully, because if I had, we might not have found Orabeskopf. We might not have found a climb that was better than passable, maybe even great.

On June 1 we woke before dawn, placed our homemade grass brush in our backpack, filled our water bottles, and hiked for the last time across talus and grassy slopes filled with puffed adders, horned adders, and spitting cobras. We racked up and climbed 13 pitches to the top. I sunk my hands into freshly cleaned cracks, their grit pressing into my flesh. I brushed, blew, and kicked dirt off footholds—dirt we'd dropped there from our efforts in the crack above. We chimneyed, offwidthed, jammed, laybacked, and stemmed to the top of Southern Crossing, V 5.11+. It's climbing I would travel anywhere to do.

The ascent is chronicled in the documentary *Waypoint Namibia* by Alstrin Films. Get culture and insight into why Namibia might be the new model for African conservation at www.waypointnamibia.com. [Portions of this story were previously published in the 2010 Petzl catalogue: www.petzl.com.]

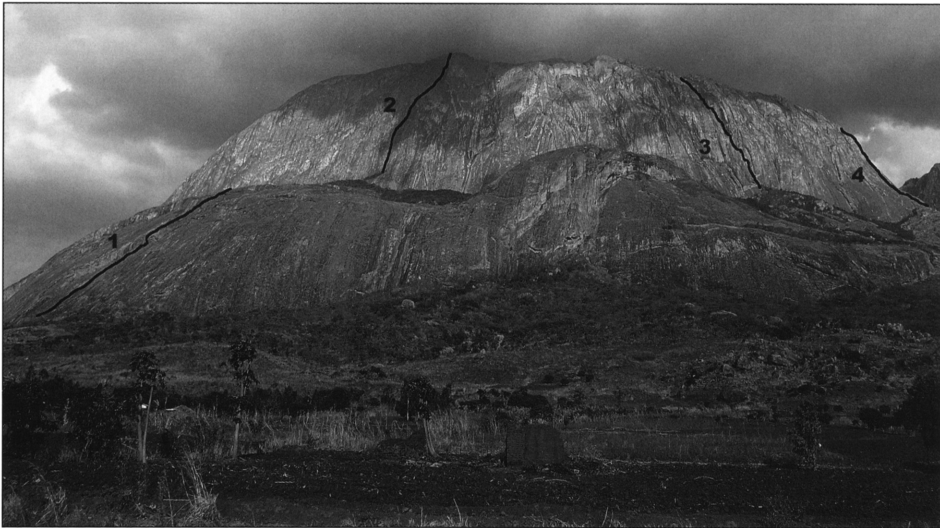
MAJKA BURHARDT, AAC

MALAWI

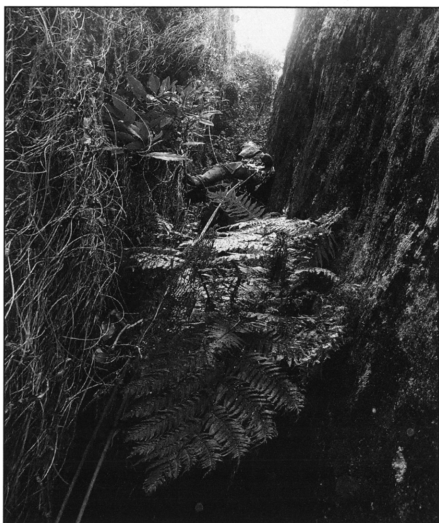
MULANJE MASSIF

Chambe, west face, Nkhalango Khoswe; lower Eastwood-Howell Route, first free ascent. Situated south of Tanzania and west of Mozambique, Malawi is a small country in southern Africa best known for its lake of the same name. A year ago Jeremy Roop and I had stumbled across a website describing a half-mile-long, 5,500' wall on the west face of Chambe, one of many peaks comprising the Mulanje Massif (9,850'). The wall was described as being broken after 2,000' by a large, broad jungle terrace, above which was an additional 3,500' wall. After reading the 1988 Frank Eastwood guidebook and firsthand accounts by two South African climbers, Alard Hufner and Mark Seuring, who had climbed on the west face in 1997, we decided it warranted further exploration. We found accounts of only two routes on the lower face and two on the upper face, three of which were pioneered by Eastwood in the late 1970s. We felt sure that we could find a new route to the top, preferably to the left of the Eastwood Route on the upper wall.

After arriving in Lilongwe, we began the hectic process of shuttling gear south through Blantyre to Likhubula, a town at the base of the Mulanje Massif. While in Blantyre, we chanced to meet Maggie O'Toole, Chairperson of the Malawi Mountain Club, who provided additional information about the Mulanje Massif. Five days after leaving the U.S. in late September, we arrived at a small Scottish mission (the CCAP House) in Likhubula, where we camped for a nominal fee. Heeding Maggie's recommendation, we hired a local guide for the first day of our approach to the lower west face of Chambe (called the Approach Slabs in the guidebook) and the start of the 1977 Eastwood-Howell Route. This turned out to be an excellent decision, as



The 5,500' west face of Chambe is split by the obvious jungle terrace. (1) West Face Direct-Approach Slabs (lower Eastwood-Howell Route, 2,000', UIAA V A1, Eastwood-Howell, August 1977). (2) West Face Direct, Main Wall (upper Eastwood-Howell Route, 3,500', UIAA VI A1, Eastwood-Howell, August 1977). (3) Nkhalango Khoswe (3,000+', IV 5.10, Forrester-Roop, October 2009). (4) Roshnik's Route (1,500', UIAA V, Bright-Strachan-Roshnik, September 1969). Not shown, left of (1), is Northwest Slab Route (2,000', UIAA V, Eastwood-Leisten, October 1976). *Jeremy Roop*



Joe Forrester climbing through a vegetated chimney high on Nkhalango Khoswe. *Jeremy Roop*

we had to transect private fields and weave our way intricately through increasingly thick jungle. In addition our guide Edwin taught us rudimentary Chichewa, the local language, which proved invaluable during our future unguided treks in the region.

On October 3 we awoke in the pre-dawn hours and walked four hours to the bottom of the lower west face, carrying a rope and light rack. Our goal was to climb the Eastwood-Howell Route, and then spend time perusing the upper west face for a potential new line. We soloed the first 1,000' quickly, the difficulties never more than 5.7. But the climbing was surreal. Large velozia bushes and clumps of grass had recently been burned in a large wildfire, and we climbed upward among ash and charred trees, which lent a post-apocalyptic feel. The first major obstacle was an overhanging headwall created by a roof

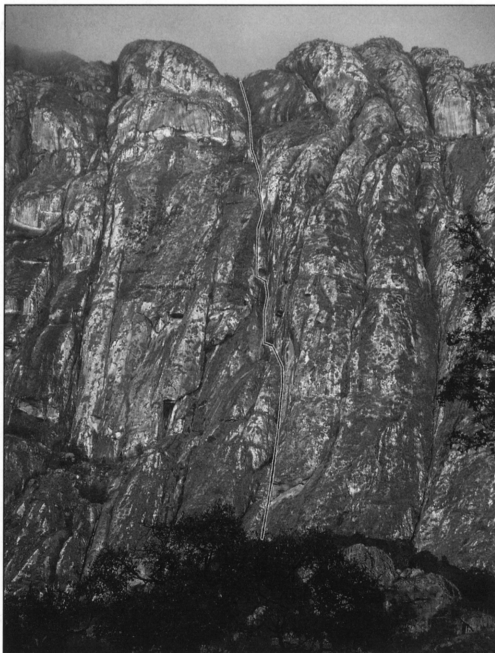
system crossing the lower face. According to the guidebook, the first ascensionists had attempted the obvious crack line but were forced to avoid it by drilling a bolt ladder. Approaching the crack, we found it entrenched with vegetation. Undeterred, Jeremy on-sighted the pitch, rating in 5.10d. The climbing was "fully jungle", with the crux an overhanging fist/offwidth to a "Tarzan vine"

move. Above, the difficulty decreased, but the burned vegetation and ash increased, making climbing difficult. Despite these obstacles, we eventually reached the jungle terrace. We had completed the first known free ascent of the lower Eastwood-Howell route, at III 5.10d (2,000').

The terrace turned out to be bigger than it appeared from below and the jungle horrendous and devoid of trails or paths. Constantly fearful of cobras, mambas, and troops of unruly baboons, all of which we had been warned of, we clawed our way through knife-sharp grass and pricker bush. After three hours of "jungling," we arrived at the base of the upper Eastwood-Howell (we advise future parties to take one of the natural stream beds, instead of the pricker fields). To our disappointment the upper face of Chambe, left of the Eastwood-Howell, looked devoid of continuous natural features. While the granite featured

numerous edges, there were few crack lines, and the face was densely covered with grass. We felt this part of the wall would require siege tactics and substantial bolting, and not wanting to embark on such a mission, traversed the terrace south. We spotted a continuous crack system left of the 1969 Roshnik's Route, the only other known line on the upper west face. Stashing our gear at the base, we hiked off the terrace and back to Likhubula. After two days rest to heal jungle-induced wounds, we returned to the face and bivouacked at the base of our proposed route. Early on the 7th we started up the crack line, which from below had looked relatively clean. However, we found it to be a 3,000' nightmarishly vegetated slot, requiring every jungleering skill we had. We simul-climbed difficulties up to 5.8, and belayed four sections with difficulties up to 5.10. The majority of the climb was 5.5. The highlight was the 600' "Shelob's Lair," a huge, dark, bomb-bay chimney filled with spiders, scorpions, and other nasty critters. The climb became increasingly vegetated as we approached the summit, and we became adept at lassoing loosely adhered vellozia trees for protection. Six hours after starting, we reached the summit, leading or following each pitch free and on sight, leaving no fixed gear. We named the route Nkhalango Khoswe (Chichewa for Jungle Rats; 3,000+', IV 5.10.)

The Mulanje Massif is a magical place. The level of adventure was fantastic and the local people incredibly friendly, inviting us into their homes and making us feel part of the community. For further information talk with the Malawi Mountain Club, which can provide a wealth of information about access, conditions, and route activity. We thank the AAC and the Mountain Fellowship Grant for supporting this trip.



The new American route Nkhalango Khoswe seen from Chambe's lower west face-Approach Slabs. Joe Forrester